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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001420

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: RUSSIANS ON ZATOKA

REF: ASHGABAT 1403

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Both the Russian government and the Russian embassy in Ashgabat have been fully engaged in trying to find a resolution to the case of environmental activist Andrei Zatoka. According to the Russian DCM, he has been in touch with both the Russian Presidential Administration and the Chair of Russia's Civil Society Institution and Human Rights Commission Ella Pamfilova on this case. The Russians have formally requested permission to meet with Zatoka, who is a Russian-Turkmen dual national. If the embassy gets that permission, they will send someone to Zatoka's appellate trial on November 6. Nevertheless, the Russian DCM was convinced that the case will be favorably resolved by the end of the year, with Zatoka released as a "deliverable" for President Medvedev's visit on December 14. END SUMMARY.

FULLY ENGAGED

12. (C) We met November 5 with Russian Embassy DCM Aleksey Demin to discuss the case of arrested environmental activist Andrei Zatoka (reftel), who is a Russian-Turkmen dual national. Demin said that the Russian government and the embassy in Turkmenistan are fully engaged on this issue. Demin, who has served as Charge for the past several months until today, has been in close contact on the Zatoka issue with the Russian Presidential Administration, which is also closely following the case. He also has spoken on the phone several times with the Chair of Russia's Civil Society Institution and Human Rights Commission Ella Pamfilova.

REQUESTED ACCESS

13. (C) Demin recently met for 1-1/2 hours with Zatoka's wife, who explained everything she knew about the case. Following that meeting, the Russian embassy sent a diplomatic note to MFA asking for information as well as contact with Zatoka. To date, there has been no response. If a response is received today, the Russians will send someone to attend tomorrow's appellate trial in Dashoguz and meet with Zatoka. As Demin pointed out, they could send someone anyway, but he wouldn't get into the trial or meet Zatoka. The Russians intend to continue to push for a concrete answer to their

query.

¶4. (C) Demin noted that the official version of events claims that Zatoka initiated the fight. Zatoka's wife claims it was all a provocation. In reality, "it's difficult to say" what really happened. Nevertheless, the Russians want to find out. The fact that this is Zatoka's second arrest complicates his situation.

DON'T STIR THE POT

¶5. (C) During his conversations with Ella Pamfilova, Demin explained that the proliferation of Internet articles in Russian, which were uniformly critical of Turkmenistan, only served to stir the pot. He noted that this was Asia, and in the East, being criticized in public only causes people to react negatively. The Russian government, however, wants a normal solution and not a delayed or more difficult one.

DUAL NATIONALITY ISSUE

¶6. Demin said there is a Turkmenistan-Russia bilateral agreement on dual nationality that recognizes that when someone is living permanently in one of the states of which he is a citizen, he is subject to that state's laws. If he had been only a Russian national, the Turkmen would have reported his arrest to the Russian embassy, and the Russians would have demanded that he be sent to Russia. Demin noted that Zatoka can renounce his Turkmen citizenship and "this is an angle being pursued."

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SOLVED BY THE END OF THE YEAR

¶7. (C) Regardless of current complications, Demin believed that the case would be resolved by the end of the year when President Medvedev visits Turkmenistan on December 14. Given the strong Russian interest and the importance of personal diplomacy to the Turkmen, Demin believed Zatoka's release and deportation would be a "deliverable" when the two Presidents meet.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The Russians are very active on this issue and very confident that Zatoka will be released for Medvedev's visit. And they may be right.
CURRAN